

Harvard Alumni Urge Return of Banished ROTC Program

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BOSTON — Senior cadet Charles Cromwell calls ROTC the best thing about his time at Harvard, despite the early morning drills and rigorous physical exercises. Still, he has little doubt that Harvard is sending a negative message about the military with its ban of the Reserve Officer Training Corps.

"I think it's a pretty powerful statement," Cromwell said. "You don't want military on campus. You don't even want to see it."

Thirty-two years after Harvard banished ROTC during the anti-war movement, influential alumni motivated by the recent terror attacks are urging the university to welcome it back.

Advocates say the school's stance sends the wrong message about the military at a time when soldiers are at risk overseas.

"I would say it's deplorable," said David Clayman, a member of the Class of 1938, who founded Advocates for Harvard ROTC.

Clayman has collected 900 signatures from alumni calling for Harvard to again recognize ROTC, and he expects thousands more. Among the signees are former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and Staples founder Leo Kahn. Clayman plans to submit the petition to Harvard's new president, Lawrence Summers.

Still, some say the school shouldn't change its policy until the military stops discriminating against gays.

"I think it would be a huge mistake," said Kevin Jennings, a Harvard graduate and member of Harvard's Gay and Lesbian Caucus.

He added, "The people making this argument should be ashamed of themselves for taking advantage of a national crisis to advance their agenda."

ROTC was established nationwide in 1913 to ensure educated men were well represented in the armed forces. It provides students with thousands of dollars in scholarships in return for a commitment to serve in the military after graduation.

Harvard was among several schools, including Yale, Dartmouth and New York University, that booted ROTC during the Vietnam War in 1969.

Harvard also stopped funding the program in 1995, saying the military's "Don't ask, don't tell" policy toward gays violated its non-discrimination policy.

With no campus office, the 43 Harvard cadets in the Army, Navy and Air Force ROTC now must travel crosstown to the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. And the \$135,000 in costs for Harvard cadets is paid to MIT by a group of anonymous donors.

Harvard university spokesman Joe Wrinn said the school made sure students could still participate in ROTC by finding the donors.

"We have nothing but the highest appreciation for students who make this commitment," he said. "The bottom line here continues to be that those who wish to be a part of ROTC can be."

Weinberger said the school is discriminating against students' interest in ROTC by withholding funding.

"No one can deny military training is a vital part of today's life, like any other academic study," he said.

The move to re-establish ROTC at Harvard is already a hot-button issue on a famously liberal campus in Cambridge where a recent peace rally drew several times more students than a patriotism rally.

This week, an undergraduate council member proposed reopening debate on the issue, but he was rebuffed by other members who worried the issue would be too divisive.

But Summers, the school's new president, recently called military service "noble."

"We need to be careful about adopting any policy on campus of non-support for those involved in defending the country," Summers said, according to the *Harvard Crimson*, the campus newspaper. "Every Harvard student should be proud that we have in our midst students who make the commitment to ROTC."

Even if Harvard were to recognize ROTC, the Army wouldn't return because it would be too costly, said Maj. Robert W. Curran, assistant professor of military science at MIT's ROTC program.

However Harvard's support would send a positive message, he said, and also allow ROTC to recruit on campus and enjoy the free on-campus mailing privileges of other Harvard groups. Curran said cutting off ROTC is not the best way to influence policy-makers on the gay issue.

Jennings said dialogue should only take place at Harvard when the military policy toward gays changes.

"I think Harvard should continue to advocate for a military where the only qualification to serve is a desire to serve, and a love for your country," he said.